

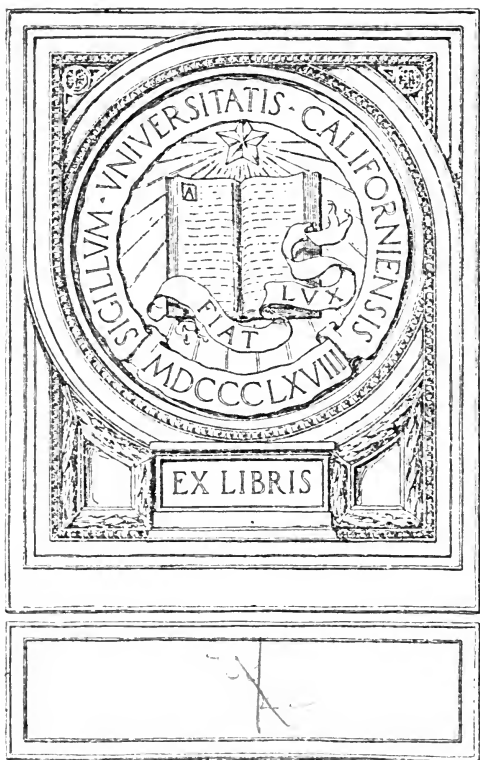
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# MEMNON





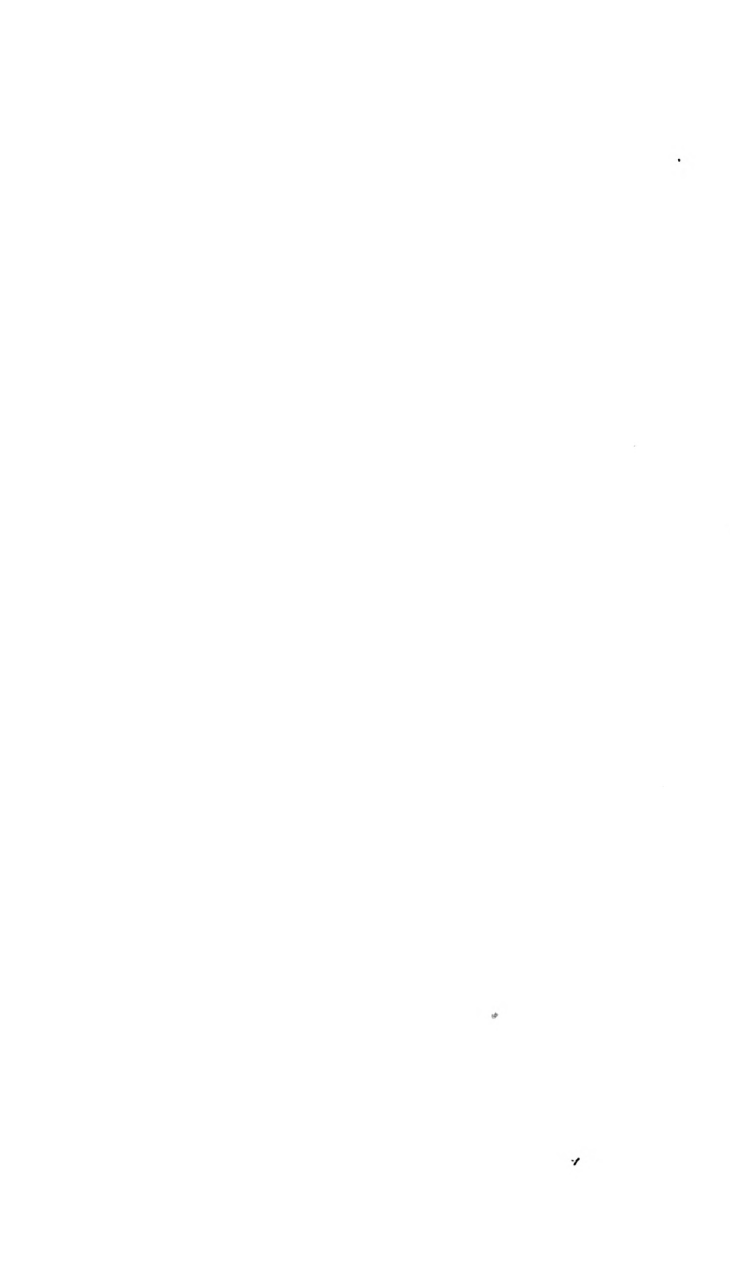








# AGAMEMNON





# AGAMEMNON

AFTER THE GREEK OF

ÆSCHYLUS

BY

LOCKE ELLIS

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## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

AGAMEMNON.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

CASSANDRA.

AEGISTHUS.

A WATCHMAN.

A HERALD, TALTHYBIUS.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF ARGOS, COUNCILLORS.

FOLLOWERS OF AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, AEGISTHUS.

## PERSONS ALLUDED TO

ATREUS, father of Agamemnon. His House is also referred to as that of Pelops ; Tantalus.—Brother to

THYESTES, to whom Atreus gave to eat of his own children's flesh. Aegisthus was his surviving son.

IPHIGENEIA, daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, offered in sacrifice by her father on the eve of the expedition to Troy.

PRIAM, King of Troy, father of Cassandra and of

PARIS (ALEXANDER), who provoked the war by carrying off

HELEN, the wife of

MENELAUS, brother of Agamemnon.

CALCHAS, a soothsayer.

ATÉ, ERYNNUS, are avenging deities, or Furies.



# AGAMEMNON

SCENE : *Argos, before the palace of the Atreidæ ; night.*

## WATCHMAN

My watch on Atreus' roof, crouched like a dog,  
I keep. Beseech ye gods, is there no end ?  
Labour of years, I know the heavens by heart,  
The stars' assembled state, revolving on  
The event of summer heat or winter cold,  
The human year through. By their signs I know,  
Splendours of rising or of setting ; stars  
Burning in ether. But the sign I seek  
Is earthly kindled fire, the torch of Troy,  
Her blaze of capture. With so eager heart,  
Impatient of the event, set me this task  
A woman, masterful enough. And now,  
Night-chill'd and drench'd with dew my cheerless  
couch,  
Not in the happy company of dreams,  
Instead of sleep which bringeth them, the dread  
Of heavy-lidded sleep stands ever here.  
And should I wisely think with wakeful song

To batter sleepy silence, then the theme  
Is sorrow of the house I serve ; tears then  
For chance the good once was and is not now,  
May be again. And that evangel fire,  
In darkling night imagined, it might be  
The end at last. But is it—is it not  
The end at last ? But see—it is no dream,  
It dawns as never day, and shoots the flame  
Argos shall dance to. Hail, O hail ! Shout, call,  
'Tis Agamemnon's wife I summon, swift  
As chamber of sleep can yield her, to proclaim  
The essential feast of sound. Taken is Troy;  
So saith the torch and fiery blazon. Mine  
This prelude, dancing ; mine the lucky sice  
Whose triple cast hath turned to a master's good  
The watchful stake. And mine the glory, when  
On these worthless those honoured hands and dear  
Are laid, of him who hath returned to us.  
—But best let silence tread upon the tongue,  
As an ox treadeth surely. If these walls  
Could speak, 'twere with discretion, and so I  
To them which know, and unto others, naught.

### CHORUS

Ten years of Troy. Hath Priam to this length  
Held Menelaus, Agamemnon's strength  
At indecision of the Dardan field ?  
To foes like these not yield !

2 Twin-sceptred, dual-throned Mycenian line  
Of Pelops' race divine,  
Who from these shores charged the reluctant gale 3  
With keels of battle of a thousand sail,  
God Ares in his might.  
Behold the birds of famine, flight on flight,  
Winnowing with wings for scourge  
The unstable element and mountain gorge.  
Some towering fate to the dark winds hath flung  
Their shattered aeries and their screaming young ;  
Labour of nesting vain,  
Hear now in heaven the parent host complain.  
—Yea, one in heaven hath heard.  
Is it Zeus, or Pan, or calm Apollo's word  
Upon that trespass bold  
Flings judgment down and vengeance mused of  
old ?  
—Yea, it is Zeus, the lawgiver of souls,  
Who this offence controls,  
And hath against the state of Paris hurled  
The two-throned Argive world.  
For sacrifice of fame  
Of many-suited queen of Argive name,  
Danaan and Trojan arm  
Alike through the tempestuous alley swarm  
Of battle's close embrace.  
The warrior stumbles in the bloody race,  
The splintered spear-shaft flies,  
And in the dust he gropes and in the dust he dies.

Let be as hath been. All is thus fulfilled  
As the Relentless willed.  
No stagnant ritual  
Of blood or ancient embers shall recall,  
Nor with dark tears importunate  
The once-befallen fate.

And we—the unelect and old even then,  
Even when these battle-worn set sail, old men ;  
Too old for service we, when younger brood  
Set sail for Troas ; and the life they gave  
Remains with us, pasturing with crutch and stave  
The childlike remnant of our hardihood.  
For childlike 'tis, and childlike seemeth too  
This old age in the deeds it dreams to do,  
Wanting but Ares' limbs. Like death, like birth,  
Ours are the infirm feet of infant earth,  
But for the flower that is not. And so seem  
Dreams of our company, ourselves a dream.

—But thou  
Tyndareus' daughter !—now  
Comes Clytemnestra near.  
O Queen, to us make clear  
What news of fame  
Into thy councils came,  
That a city, pouring through her streets,  
Snuffs rumour, mulled with burning sweets  
From the close temple-ways.  
Lo now, ablaze



With happy gift set there,  
Kindles the altar fair  
Of deity ; and manifold,  
Other and other sacrifice behold,  
Whether Olympian or rustic name  
Or urban god his victim claim,  
Each holy hearth shines clear.  
Now torch-bearers appear,  
With their cold brands they stir  
Rich temple provender,  
The oil-vat of the priest.  
Soon the drugged flame, surceased,  
Drops in the dark abyss,  
And like spilt sorceries  
The clots of burning fall  
Red on the pale processional.  
—But thou,  
O Queen, if thou may'st speak, speak now,  
And what thou knowest share  
With us, and if our prayer  
Frustrate not heaven,  
Be thou unto our darkness given  
Pæan ; and to our doubts again  
Pæan, for these are pain.

Uncertainty !  
What if there dwell with thee  
Hope, and a vision fair ?  
Redoubled is our care,

Once we have missed those beams,  
And darker the surrounding of our dreams.

Of human fate  
This passage splendid to relate,  
This tale of kings,  
Me to the muses' godlike summit brings.  
My spirit's dawn, the worshipful, the pure  
Shall to that epic day endure,  
And no less strong,  
I too will lead earth captive with my song.

—Hear, then ; in name of vengeance be it told,  
How those relentless guards of Hellas' fold  
Gathered of helm and spear a vast command,  
And fell on Teucrian land.  
—Who bade them fall,  
Brought Hellas to this charge ? What oracle ?  
—A flight of furious wings  
Drops by the sea-encampment of the kings.  
Seen from the tents afar  
The kings of air and arbiters of war,  
Black eagle and white-tailed, a ruthless pair,  
Their living prey, the pregnant hare,  
Victim of a despairing race, oppress  
With talons merciless,  
And beaks that re-entomb  
The smoking burthen of her womb.

Sing Linos, Linos sing.  
For Sorrow's song is Hope's unburthening.

The holy Seer,  
High priest of armies, their interpreter,  
The baleful eagle-portent laid  
On Atreus' sons. Interpreting, he said :

"Far-off, perchance, and yet the day must come  
When towered Ilium  
Unto this conquest yields  
Her city and tribute fields.  
Only let not the cloud of lightning fall,  
Nor hazardous god his arsenal  
Hurl on these armies bold,  
Encincture of the Trojan hold,  
These armies fair,  
Which like a curb the Trojan masters bear.  
For Artemis,  
Intolerant as she is  
Of the wing'd hunters of her father's house,  
Furies of pity rouse,  
And names of hatred call,  
At that foul banquet ended, young and all."

—Sing Linos, Linos sing.  
For Sorrow's song is Hope's unburthening.

"But she who loves  
The nurseries of the groves,

Where the mother of the wild  
Bestows her urchin child,  
Even the couched lioness,  
She, Artemis, some theme of kindliness  
And good in midst of omen'd ill,  
Will labour to fulfil.

“Only give heed, Pæan of Prayer,  
Lest the dread Goddess new perils prepare,  
Which must a new propitiation find.  
Tempest and enemy wind :  
For these the childlike victim bleeds.  
Frenzy of wrath succeeds,  
The home-besetting  
Mother-vengeance unforgetting,  
Never husband-love recalling  
Worked in secret and on nearest falling.”

—Thus Calchas, Orator of doom.  
The Sons of Atreus in the listening gloom  
Attend that voice again,  
Of hope and dread the mixed refrain :

—Sing Linos, Linos sing.  
For Sorrow's song is Hope's unburthening.

—Zeus ! If on Zeus I call,  
What God heareth ? Is it the Lord of all,

Like unto whom is none, and none the same ?  
—None other would I name,  
But from the mind cast forth  
The imponderable worth  
Of lesser deity ; yea, whatsoe'er  
The image idly there ;

Whether with aspect huge of dead renown  
Blind face of Chaos frown,  
Or Chronos, heir to that unstable rule,  
Feel his immoderate godhead cool,  
Last tyrant in the elemental war  
To own a conqueror ;  
Reason the victor God prefers,  
For he is just, and just his worshippers.

Yea, it is Zeus brings back to wisdom's way  
The foolish feet that stray ;  
Outlaws of guilty pain  
On whom long time hath lain  
The curse of the lost theme  
Of innocence, an evil dream  
Of devious path and never-found content,  
That the unwilling spirit at last is bent  
To the fixed purpose of his fate.  
Mild, but reiterate,  
Indissoluble word,  
The sentence of great gods is heard,

As it were charity that falls  
From the high table of their judgment halls ;  
Wisdom, the great gods' gift to balance pain,  
Sad lustre of their patient reign.

— An end of soothsaying ;  
And now, fearless of fate, arose the King.  
The ships at mooring stood  
By Aulis, whence the flood  
Rolls back on Calchis, and from Strymon's mouth  
Recoils, and empties into drouth  
His waste and stagnant streams.  
Now the hollow gulf beteems  
With starving winds, that vex the adverse shore.  
Ships may not sail, their counted store  
Dwindles, they may not fill the vat,  
And eke the mealy bin nor that  
Which too long waiting makes in vain,  
The cargo of their hopes again.

— So much had Calchas said ;  
The inclement Goddess' name with dread  
Preferred, and showed which way the fateful blast  
And wintry hazard fell. The monarchs cast  
Their sceptres to the ground ; tears could not hide.  
And now the Elder and the Father cried :

“ O death of hope ! If the alternative  
Were only not to live.

But to be this, the slayer of my child,  
My household grace to see defiled  
With her own blood ; a father's hand to take  
That stain ! Yet what ? Shall I forsake  
My kingdom, and her allies' hopes defeat ?  
What, I, first captain of the fleet,  
Its grand deserter prove ? No. This way lies  
By tempest-lulling sacrifice  
Of maiden-death, a forward path.  
Wrath leads that way, but all ways lead to wrath."

—So he put on the harness of his fate,  
Made trial of the weight  
Of shameful counsel, and became  
Himself a counsellor of shame.  
For like a change of tempest-boding wind  
To mortal mind,  
Suggestion first breathed in  
Grows to the fury and the act of sin.  
—See now to slay his child  
The father reconciled,  
That ships may aid  
The vengeful wars that women made,  
And spread on speeding gales  
Their festival of sails,  
He to the heartless lords of strife  
Makes over that dear life.  
No reckoning theirs  
Of startled childhood's tears or daughter's prayers.

Nay, it is he, the father, gives command  
To them that be at hand,  
Following the priestly service round  
To pitch of temple-sound,  
In order of blood-ritual, instead  
Of kid, at the great-altar head,  
The body of maiden-sacrifice to lift.

See from her upraised form the garments drift,  
Her scarf of crocus dye.  
But they have caught the struggling cry,  
Which ere it left those lovely lips  
Had called down doom and night's eclipse  
Upon that house of blood. The last  
Despairing look is on her tyrants cast.  
Pity she seemeth still to seek,  
Her eyes say what her lips would speak,  
As in a picture. Nevermore  
Will she appear her father's guests before,  
The darling of his pride.  
As when in high hall, fondly by his side,  
The third libation past and song begun,  
With right good will, most loved and innocent one,  
She did her clear and childish voice upraise  
In his dear praise.

—As Calchas said, so it befell.  
If of the future we would tell,



This prophet-listening brings the scale to rest  
At silence. There's a Wisdom doth attest  
The ranging of our sight,  
And still from daily light  
Doth hide all but the issue of a day.  
Still we can weigh  
The good that is with what may be.  
—The Queen approaches. She  
May still some part of good prefer,  
And Argos still for guidance look to her.

*[Enter CLYTEMNESTRA from the palace.]*

#### CHORUS

—Queen Clytemnestra, great as are thy cares  
In the long-lasting absence of the king,  
So great the duty that we owe to thee.  
Therefore, that thou enlighten us, we crave,  
Not importunely, but with patience even ;  
Why hast thou thus ordained a festival ;  
What tidings, of what happy consequence,  
Dost thou possess ?

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

This is the hour of dawn.  
And if I tell you tidings, 'tis to say,  
This is the dawn of our long night of hope.  
What more ? Shall I say then that Priam's city  
Hath unto Argos fallen ?

CHORUS

This if thou saidst,  
Mine ears could scarce receive.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear it again.  
Troy falls to us.

CHORUS

O, then, mine eyes are dim.  
This, this is news.

CLYTEMNESTRA<sup>1</sup>

O yes, you weep for joy.

CHORUS

A proof of this, O queen ; some witness, sign—

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why should the gods mock us ?

CHORUS

Was it a dream ?  
A visitant of sleep too credulous ?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Am I a visionary, so to be  
Beguiled ?

CHORUS

Some rumour thou hast ta'en for truth.

CLYTEMNESTRA

So childish, I ?

CHORUS

Nay, then ; when fell the city ?

CLYTEMNESTRA

This night—the mother of this dawn.

CHORUS

None could

Have brought the news so soon.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What of the fire

—Hephaistus' signal, first on Ida sprung,  
And hither westward journeying, destined torch  
Of courient flame ; instant in Lemnos, soon  
In Athos streaming from the peak of god,  
And lighting on the mounds of Thracian seas  
Like drifts of dawn to the Eubœan shore,  
Makistus' watchers there. Sleepless they rise,  
And set in train those sentinels of light  
That wink across the dark and inland strait,  
Messapius opposite, his parched heaths

A crimson cloud. Asopus winds below  
Through all his valley, as in midnights when  
Cithæron's moon sinks westerly upon  
His height divine. On, on those beacons spread,  
And now the lake Gorgopis overpast,  
And Ægiplanctus' summit fired, therefrom  
The torrent flame, blown like a giant's beard,  
Brushes the walls of Saron's ferry ; thence  
Arachnæus not far, whose kindly heights  
Our neighbour and familiar vision fill.  
The light that lingers yet is Ida's own,  
And Troy burns here. This is the sign I give.  
And by the statutes of the torch-racers,  
One from another catching speed of light,  
So that the last is first,—this is the word  
My lord hath sent me, out of Troy.

#### CHORUS

For this  
We'll praise the gods in due time, save that now  
Not one word would we lose of this great theme.  
Beseech you, with your tidings to the end.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Methinks I hear the captured city voice  
Confusion. Well, the elements make not  
For peace. Victor and vanquished, vinegar  
And oil—as soon would they assort within

The crucible. Hark—'tis the living seek  
Their dead. Soon chains shall rack the sobbing throats.  
After the night of stubborn battle, men  
Would break their fast ; a weary soldiery  
Camp in the streets and eat the bread of chance.  
Happy, for they have roof for dwelling now ;  
No more black watch and meagre rest beneath  
The tentless cold of heaven, and they will be  
As housed men, their sleep unsentinel'd.  
But let them not forget the native gods  
To hold in awe, that victors in their turn  
Become not captives of a wrath revealed  
To the inflamed eyes of sacrilege,  
And spoilers of the sacred field. Enough.  
Race so near home must be run to the end.  
Yet—if it otherwise befell, and if  
The army had escaped—still there are those  
On whom the penalty, though long delayed  
Must fall. Well, these are woman's words you hear,  
And may the issue be more plain to see ;  
The good for choice, and my choice over all.

#### CHORUS

O, manlike as thou speakest ; taking sign  
From thee, I will approach the gods, assured  
Of grace enough to foil disaster.

O Zeus ! thy light we see,  
And Night, thou marshal of eternity,

Who didst within thy starry net enfold  
The towered Trojan hold.  
—That now, of all  
Who in those meshes captive lay,  
None who was mighty then, and none so small  
But in the sack of doom is borne away.  
For this acclaim  
Zeus, whose vengeful thunder's flame,  
To the instant golden  
Of starry time withholden,  
A bolt infallible  
On Alexander fell.  
Its journey from the place  
Of thunder ye may trace  
To the lightning fall.

'Tis said, withal,  
That heaven-begotten wrath  
Disdains to follow in the path  
Of man's deluded choice.  
List not, 'tis error's voice.  
Wiser their children are,  
Whose fathers, plotting in the realms of war  
Carried beyond its place  
The swollen scutcheon of their race ;  
Whose faithful service, lent  
Only to enterprise of fair intent,  
Had never failed. But earthly gain  
Little avails that tyrant whose brute reign

Spurns the mild sanctities of justice. Him  
Doth frenzy dim  
Of an ancestral impulse bend  
To the resistless end.

The irremediable blight  
Of nature maketh in the light  
A baleful showing, as beneath  
His hand, the burnisher discovereth  
An ill-mixed bronze, a metal base.  
The people of his race  
Take up the burden of their lord's defeat,  
When from her cage the fleet  
Captive, wild hope, hath flown,  
And remedy is none,  
But echo far the cries  
Of passion's children, in derisive skies.  
—None other, but the same  
Was Paris, when he came,  
Guest, to entreat in shameful sort the spouse  
Of host.

She, from her husband's house  
Fugitive, in her ear  
Clashing of shield and spear,  
Ships lading war, hath come  
With doom for dower, to Ilium ;  
Daring, O greatly daring, she,  
The tongues of prophecy

Not silent ; woe, they cry,  
Woe to the house and them that stand thereby,  
For errant love, the trespass that effaced  
Fair paths of memory traced  
By married feet. Who now remembers him,  
Alone in palace dim,  
When grief's dumb scourge and whispered ban  
Speak more than words of desolation can ;  
And troubled as with seaward dreams  
The phantom-rule of silence seems,  
And mourns a queen's departed grace.  
Image of her in sculptured face  
Intolerable appears,  
And love himself a mask of famine wears,  
The heavy eyes are famine's.

Dreams of sleep

Still lure those baffled wings to keep  
The paths of no return, and stay  
The traveller at the gates of day.  
So, heavier to sustain  
Than sorrow's self, those shapes of pain  
Stand round the hearthstone drear,  
And worse than battle's brunt to bear,  
Against the soldier's citadel of home  
Legions of trouble come.  
Pierced to the heart are they  
Who cheered the warrior forth and bade not stay  
Him who should soon return.  
But not this funeral-ship, this urn,



These ashes. Never these.

Yet what

Hath Ares in his balance ? Not

Gold, no nor other merchandise

Than the white dust that lies

At Ilium's furnace-gates.

With this he freights

For mourners the funestral vessel cold,

And fills the vase of old

Renown ; such tribute theirs

Who fall, but chiefly his who bears

The stroke of battle, sought in name

Of honour and unsullied fame

Of house and sacred home.

Whether from thence there come

Mute threnody and uncomplaint,

Or if rebellious voices taint

The air of praise,

And envy 'gainst the avengers' house inveighs.

And fair, forbye,

The dead that still in earth of Ilium lie,

That conquered land, which hath

Its conquerors taken prisoner in death's path.

If it become a people's curse,

Deadly is that rancour of tongues, and worse

To look for. As night loads

The listening mind with terror, gods,

The avengers of blood-guiltiness,  
These are not blind, nor less  
Watchful Erynnus is in her dark place,  
Of fortune's scale, quick to displace  
The beam. When evil seems to prosper most,  
The abyss receives, and all is lost ;  
And sunken in heaven's thunderstroke  
The ears that listened when the flatterer spoke.  
—Be mine no more nor less  
Than the unenvied mean of happiness.  
Never the stricken sun  
Which captive eyes look on,  
Light my life's journey, nor  
Myself a conqueror.

Fresh from the joyful flame  
Runs rumour—whether in truth's name,  
Or falsehood's, who shall tell ?  
There are false gods, as well.  
But 'tis a child, or fool, whose spirit fires  
At kindled torch and with the flame expires.  
✱ A woman 'tis, who doth prefer  
To what is true, that which seems best to her,  
And to fresh pasture flies  
Outside all reason's boundaries.

✱—Soon shall we know whether a heart of truth  
In this fable of fire, or torch of dream  
Delight our eyes. Herald himself I see ;

Under the olive shadows, hard from shore,  
The road returns to dust. Dust tells his speed,  
Swifter than flame of the green mountain wood,  
And words to come, clearer than smoke of fire.  
Rejoice ; prepare all for rejoicing now,  
Or—silent be the word—if any speak it,  
Of his faith's treason let him pluck the fruit.

#### HERALD

My native land ! The years have past, the light  
Of this tenth summer brings me to thy shore.  
One hope, among the many blighted, lives,  
If it were hope, Argos, that kept in mind  
But never dared to build on thy dear soil  
The allotment of a tomb. Now praise the earth,  
The sun, and Zeus the country's god, and him  
The Pythian—not on us his arrows fall,  
Not now, as once by strange Scamander. Now  
'Tis O Apollo, Saviour, Healer, Lord.  
And praise to other gods ; to those of old  
Arenas and the fields of peace. Him too,  
The patron of my life, the adored, the first  
Of Heralds, Hermes. So would I approach  
The chiefs of our renown, whose spirits urged  
Ours to the test of war, that from the path  
Of spear returned, they may with grace receive  
Our remnant. Hail, then, hearthstone of our race,  
And palace of our king ; as oft of old,  
Sun-spirits of the holy place of home,

In order seasonal, your gracious eyes  
Let rest on him returned, to light your dark,  
As well as ours. Let all be well that waits  
For him, all welcome. Good it seems, for out  
Of Justice' hand—from Zeus himself he took  
The spade that levelled Troy. Remaineth there  
No altar, no place for an altar, no  
Life ;—underground the seed of it is dead.  
Such was his word ; such was the yoke he put  
On Troy. Who else ? Elder of Atreus' House,  
Man happiest in his choice of gods—who else  
Of mortals worthier ? Not for Paris now  
Is left to boast the advantage his in scale  
Of deed and penalty. He held the stakes,  
And with that forfeit went not he alone,  
But home and country and his father's house.

CHORUS

Hail ! Messenger.

HERALD

Moment so charged with joy !  
I'd not gainsay the fate that slew me now.

CHORUS

So lovely seems thy native land ?

HERALD

Tears come.

So fair,

CHORUS

From us that sweet distemper's caught.

HERALD

Plain words can reach a child's heart. Such is mine.

CHORUS

As you were stricken, so were we.

HERALD

You mean  
The land we longed for longed for our return ?

CHORUS

With many a sigh, in gloom of heart.

HERALD

Was heart  
So strained ? And whence the burden of it ?

CHORUS

Ills  
There are, on which physician Silence waits.

HERALD

Alarms that fill an empty house. Whence then  
The assault you feared ?

## CHORUS

Just now you said  
That death were happiness.

## HERALD

When all's well done,  
As must be true at last. To tell the worst  
Is but to say that of the enterprise  
A part went wrong. Better than this may be.  
There are gods, doubtless they know. My story's one  
Of hardship ; meagre fare aboard and ill  
Lodging ashore, if harbour made at all.  
No day of grateful memory to break  
The luckless process. Then, to come to land,  
To bed outside the foeman's walls upon  
The aguish earth, beneath the watering skies.  
Soon marish-like, with matted clothes and hair,  
We grew foul creatures. Winter cold, the same  
That laid the small birds dead in Ida's snow ;  
And heat, as when the breathless waters even  
Swooned to the noonday tropic and became  
A waveless hush upon a muted shore.  
But why take up old burdens in the tale  
Of things ended ? The dead themselves have made  
An end of all desire to live again,  
And shall they die again in our report ?  
There is enough on the fair side the scale,  
Balm for survivors, over land and sea

Flying with eager hearts towards some goal  
And residue of good, as seemly is,  
In the still shining sunlight of their day.  
Remains to us on Hellas' temple walls  
To fix the seal and the eternal fame  
Of Troy captured. And they who gaze thereon  
Will praise our land, our leaders and our god,  
Who brought these things to pass. I have said all.

#### CHORUS

Who shall gainsay ? Not I, for unto age  
Fair knowledge ever brings a spirit of youth.  
But first the King's house—Clytemnestra first  
Let touch this gift of fame. Then may we taste.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

When on the night's horizon first appeared  
The writ of Troy in flames, did I delay  
Pæan ? Already is the city awake.  
One said to me, a trick of flame, forsooth,  
Can on a woman's mind project this folly,  
And stand for Trojan fall. Enough was said  
To prove me mad. Yet unto sacrifice  
Did I proceed, the while with fair address  
My women went the temple round and fed  
With sweets the hungry censers lapping flame.  
—Herald, I have no need of your report ;  
My lord's own words shall satisfy me soon.

Howbeit, do aught you know to speed him ; say  
His city awaits his coming ; say, his queen.  
To her—to woman—never sight more fair  
Than this of prosperous gods and opening gates  
Upon the homeward road of war. And then,  
For him, returned at last, who left his house  
In faithful keeping, dog-like faith to find,  
And battle done with trespass ; undisturbed  
The seal he fastened for inviolate time.  
I know not ill, and the repute of ill  
Touching another man leaves me unstained  
As metal dipped in dye. Truth to the brim  
Pours out my boastful cup. Who'd flinch from it ?  
No woman of my race.

#### CHORUS

##### Interpreter

Of words—hear these ; she speaks them well ; there's  
much  
To learn of her. But tell me, Herald,—'tis  
Of Menelaus that I ask—has he,  
The joint desire of all our people, part  
In your return ?

#### HERALD

I would not, if I could,  
Dress out ill news as fair ; fruit that would rot  
Soon as you plucked it.



CHORUS

And the good you told  
Lose virtue of truth. So to divorce from truth  
Helps not to hide.

HERALD

He's gone, then, whom you said.  
He and his crew out of our sight are gone.

CHORUS

What, from the field of war, from Troas shore  
Set earlier sail ? Or from the common fleet  
Did tempest gulf him ?

HERALD

That, a goodly aim,  
Cuts off betimes the unwilling story.

CHORUS

Yet  
Some tale of life or death must be to tell.  
What say the shipmen ?

HERALD

What avails to say,  
When none knows anything ? Unless the Sun  
Of earth, the cherisher of life, should know  
His foster-children.

## CHORUS

By what malice, then,  
Inhuman, came the storm, and ended how ?

## HERALD

I would not mar the day of auspices  
With other tales than good. There are other gods ;  
As when the herald of defeated camps,  
Visaged with those disasters, to his city bears  
Arms of calamity ; the wound of state  
Envenoming the private wounds of war.  
A deathly curse it is the stifled dirge  
Erynnus has to sing ; not saviour deeds,  
Not Victory when it comes. And with the tale  
Of peace, how should I blend a stormful strain ?  
—Yet be it said, the end found troubles still,  
And gods not all appeased. Since, foes before,  
Water and Fire made peace between them, us  
Wretched, to overthrow. By night it came,  
Tempest upon the sea, unloading winds  
Of Thrace, like bellowing herds upon us, ship  
Foundering on ship in smoking surges pent  
And blind. Mad shepherd drove our flock that night.  
And dawn that day, dawn on the Ægean field,  
That ready seemed for harvest, flowering  
With many a drowned corpse and floating spar ;  
While we and our miraculous vessel rode  
In some divine security, our helm

In hand of saviour Fortune, to avoid  
The fangs of coast and sea. Which death escaped,  
Aghast in that pale light, our shrunken sail  
And loss beholding, we with scanty fare  
Pastured our starving hope to see again  
Our comrades ; who, if they survive, in turn  
Will think of us as dead. And so we too  
May hope ;—that somewhere still the light of day  
Kindles on Menelaus, as on us,  
Under the hand of Zeus, not mindful yet  
Utterly to destroy and from its place  
Uproot our nation.

#### CHORUS

Helen, the Conqueress !  
—One pastured to the lips in prophecies,  
Some sibyl named thee well,  
And at thy cradle sponsor stood to tell  
Thine afterfame,  
— O dreadful history in a name !  
—Helen of Troy to be,  
Of annal'd war by land and sea,  
Of arms, of men,  
Helen of nations. When  
At last, from silken pale  
Of thy sea-gazing, thou didst give a sail  
To the giant-seeded winds of the west,  
Instant upon the quest

Of thy light-running keel appeared  
Myriads, whose clashing bucklers cheered  
The hounds of blood, and hurled  
On Simois green the hunters of the world.

So at the doors of Ilium Vengeance stands  
Accountant, in her hands  
The marriage-marring evidence of fate,  
And the law violate  
Of Zeus, guest-guardian. She  
Waits, with dun adversity,  
On those who in the bridal courts prolong  
Their spendthrift song,  
Until that hymenæan falters. Hear  
In Priam's city at last the accent drear  
Of dolorous change.  
Hear Paris called the ill-wived. Voice of how strange  
Groomsmen ! But they have drawn their singing-  
breath  
In an age of death.

There was a man brought home with thought to tame  
The lion-cub reft of his milky dam.  
In his boon whelphood what  
A playmate for the younger !—not  
Unapt to rouse  
Mirth of the elder house,  
This little weanling oft  
With cringing stomach and entreatment soft

Will at their doors look in,  
And table-mercies win.  
Then trust with trust and kind with kind  
Repaid, the prosperous mite will find  
Caress more freely given,  
And lap-room even.

But Time, which to maturity  
Leads on born savagery,  
And adult Nature shows the beast of blood  
In cruel mood  
Returning shepherd-kindness. He has broken  
Into the sacred pasture, and for token  
The ruddy lintel smeared  
And startled homestead cleared  
Of frightened men, while he the unbidden feast  
Pursues ;—intemperate priest  
Of doom, which Ignorance in his mansion bred,  
At cost uncovenanted.

Came thus to Troas one, and came with her  
A prosperous weather, as it were  
Summer of idle calm  
That sowed sweet harm  
Of Eros' flower, and sought beneath those eyes  
The dangers of love's paradise.  
—A marriage-change ;  
And then, what consort strange

Is this, who next to Priam's throne  
Of Priam's people friend hath none.  
But for herself and for the land  
Hath furnished to the hand  
Of what offended god,  
In what demented haste, this rod,  
This justice-wanting  
Erynnus, women-haunting ?

Life's ancient learning, bent  
With failing eyes on truth, describes the event  
Of human happiness.  
—Not issueless  
Falls the fair branch of fortune, not  
Unfruitful dies, but hath an heir begot,  
Ill-graft upon the parent name of bliss,  
Sorrow, 'tis said, his generation is.  
—Cold creed, not mine ! Despair  
If good should evil bear.  
Rather, 'tis evil that begets his kind ;  
And to my mind  
Truth with itself is reconciled  
If fair have fair to child.  
The Pride of Life, the pampered, still  
Insatiate, hardening human will  
At every turn of fate, to oppose  
The holy gods ;—her progeny are those  
Shadows of mortal path  
And that earnest of death which hath

In the old semblance, to the long-spared home,  
At the master-moment, come.

And if mid the hearth-stains of poverty  
The lamp of Justice kindles, she  
Finding a pure faith there,  
Stays, though in many a palace fair  
Rest comes not to an eye that sees  
The soul's uncleannesses,  
The guilty palm of power, whose boastful days  
Herself hath numbered, looking divers ways.

[*Enter AGAMEMNON, with his following. CASSANDRA  
is seated in the mule-car.*

—He comes ! —The King !  
—O lord of Atreus House, Troy-conquering,  
If doubts arrest  
The voices of thy triumph, 'tis but lest  
The excess of praise mere adulation prove ;  
'Tis but that truth we love  
More than that seeming which is everywhere ;  
—The face men wear  
Of gratulation, oft a veil too thin  
To hide the unsmiling soul within ;  
Or if grief calls  
For a fraternal tear, the semblance falls  
From a dry casket. Undeceived is he  
Who in the market of humanity

His cattle knows ;  
And thou, remembering the part we chose  
In times gone by,  
Not then the flatterer's, when thou didst try  
Our counsel ; when the war  
Of Helen came, and not as things now are,  
We did thy wisdom call  
In question, and thy aim depict in all  
Its threatening hues, as when  
It came to force upon reluctant men  
The courage of fierce sacrifice,  
And pay that altar-price.  
—Know, then, the measure of good will  
Which doth our welcome fill,  
And taketh in, as well it should,  
The mighty issue thou hast brought to good.  
And know, as soon thou wilt,  
How justly, or otherwise, each man hath dealt  
His share of commonweal,  
Which one proved false, and which did strictly deal.

#### AGAMEMNON

Argos, by thee and by thy people-gods  
Be heard the first of this new voice of mine,  
To mine own house, by their solicitude  
Returned, who at their bidding went away.  
It was no mortal voice that gave Troy doom,  
By lot announced, when none profanely cast  
Into the opposing cup a rebel vote



Averse to blood ; none failed us ; so Troy fell.  
—Witness her burning ! What sweet airs prolong  
The Até-life in ashes and send forth  
Burnt odours with the carnal flames of wealth's  
Blown sacrifice ! To the gods, to the gods return  
Measures of praise heaped in the scale with these  
Vindictive spoils. Not to the spoiler in  
The chase of love this bursting net of gain.  
The male beast turned.—Thou Argive troop, compact  
Of shield, taking thy leap at last amid  
The storms of sunset, thou the battlement  
Hast cleared ; a lion now, with jaws that drip  
Majestic blood. To the gods, to the gods again  
These firstfruits.—Now to you whose weight of care  
Has held me listener, till I could have ta'en  
The burden up and spoken in your stead.  
—It is not in the heart of every man  
To gladden at the welfare of his friend.  
The envious canker there, an eye distressed  
Looks out on neighbour fortune, so to find  
Home-burdens doubled. Often have I proved  
And torn the mask from many a flattering word  
Of many a seeming friend.—Yet there was one,  
Ulysses. He did with rough words dispute  
My sailing-counsel ; but, embarked, stood true,  
And held the course with me. I speak of him ;  
I know not if 'tis of the dead I speak.  
—There's much to do ; let us take counsel on  
The state and the divine action of men.

If good be proved, how to renew that good  
To everlasting ; or, if evil be,  
Whether fire purge it or remedial knife  
Cut out the part diseased.—But now, 'tis home  
I enter ; and—the gods first even there—  
Greet gods of home ; the same who sent me forth,  
Bring me again.—Ye powers attending me  
In battle, stay my feet in paths of peace.

[*Enter CLYTEMNESTRA. While AGAMEMNON stands in salutation of the gods, she addresses the Chorus first.*]

CLYTEMNESTRA

You citizens, elders of Argos, to you  
I may refer, with less misgiving, my theme  
Of wifely duty. Humility, and fear,  
Wear out in time. The hard lot I have borne  
While he—while this man—conquered Troy—'tis my  
Affair and knowledge. What is known to all  
Is the state of that woman whom her husband  
Deserts for war. The empty house, the cold  
Alarms, dinning on the wrought mind, they come,  
One on another rumour, heaping dread.  
Wounds ;—if the word of wounds were always true,  
This man of hers was riddled like a sieve.  
Deaths ;—what was Geryon in his digged grave,  
Casting the triple cloak of earth he wore ?  
A man of fewer lives, I ween, than this.

Why, in that gloss of maddening rumour, what  
Marvel if it were said—if it were true,  
They cut me from the noose, and left me life  
I could not away with ?—Then—he is not here,  
The child, the master-witness of my faith,  
And thine—Orestes. Nay, but marvel not ;  
A neighbour cares for him, a friend at arms,  
Strophios the Phocian ; one who, warning, gave  
Shape to the fears that clung about me ;—death  
In Troas field ; kingdom without a king ;  
Dispersed council, and this house of thine  
At rabble-mercy. Was not this enough ?  
Is human-kind to trust ? Hard do I seem ?  
The springs are dry, there is not a drop remains.  
This harm was done to the once-ready fount  
Of tears. 'Twas that night-watching, that  
Unkindled fire, for thee. That broken sleep,  
Those pestered dreams, when the light-buzzing sense  
Wove in the minutes of too straitened sleep  
Patterns of fear which would have overflowed  
The waking hour. Now all is past I look  
On thee, strayed guardian of the fold returned,  
Strong helmsman, grounded column of the roof,  
Sole prop of parentage infirm, land past  
The hope of sailors, when with land appears  
Fair dawn upon the winter of the seas ;  
When, too, the endless traveller nears the green  
Of desert-wells. Surely there is no sweet  
Like that which never can be. Such the words

I deem to fit thy coming. Stand aside,  
Envy ! Though past, were there not ills we bore ?  
—Dear lord, descend ! But not to earth, O king,  
Troy-conqueror, come thy feet. Down, slaves, and  
spread

The footway ; laggards in the task assigned,  
Why this delay ? Set straight, of brodered wealth,  
A regal carpet. Justice to his house  
Unhoped for, guide him.—For the rest, not sleep  
Shall mask disclosure of our mind, and still  
Justly, and with the gods, and after fate.

#### AGAMEMNON

Daughter of Leda, guardian of my house ;  
Thou hast given me greeting, so extending speech  
To suit an absence long. More measured praise  
Had come from other lips, in awe of heaven.  
—For that, I am no woman, whom soft things  
Like words, content ; no satrap, pleased with court  
Agape, and earth-obeisance. Never spread  
For me the invidious ground of honour gods  
Alone may safely tread. I fear that path ;  
Mortal I am, give me a man's due, not  
A god's. ~ My fame subsists without the mark  
Of this dyed blazon ; were it not that heaven's  
Best gift is other, even a guiltless mind,  
And none will know, until the end, if life  
Have prospered ; till the end and all well done,  
If he have courage left for happiness.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Tell me—and let thine answer not admit  
Misunderstanding.

AGAMEMNON

That it never shall.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou hast made a boast of piety.

AGAMEMNON

If not I,

Who then should so ?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not Priam, if victor he.

AGAMEMNON

No, by my faith, he'd tread the purple path  
Here strown.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis human blame you fear in this.

AGAMEMNON

Strong censors of our acts are human tongues.

CLYTEMNESTRA

They are envious tongues. But without envy none  
Shall emulate.

AGAMEMNON

Is it a woman's part  
So to persist in strife of reason ?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yet  
It is a part of power to yield sometimes.

AGAMEMNON

Thou hast set some pressing store on this.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And still  
Am urging, in the hope still to prevail.

AGAMEMNON

So be it. Forward then, some slave, to strip  
These sandals, lest the insulting feet should mar  
That cloth of price, fabric of Tyrian seas ;  
And such ill-thrift, contemptuous use of wealth,  
Bring down the jealous armoury of heaven.  
Let be then. But—this stranger-woman. Ah !  
Bid welcome here kindly, for kindness is  
The temper of power, and the gods look for it

Where'er the abashed human spirit sustains  
Violence of slavery ; and this woman, this  
Princess ;—where the luxuriant bloom of life  
Excels in kings' houses,—she is that flower,  
The prize of kings ; and to whose arms but ours  
Should victory, dealing in spoils of fight,  
Deliver her ?—But since I am constrained,  
All by thy ruling here, my subject feet,  
On threshold purple-dight, let enter home.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

There is a field wherein is harvested  
The flower of the eternal sea, whose dyes  
Beseem the fadeless garment of our pride.  
And while our lack in this wise is no more  
Than ocean's penury, or heaven's eclipse,  
Which never yet hath ceased to shine on us,  
I had put leagues of purple down, to hear  
Rumour of thy recall, or oracle  
Prolong thy day of life 'neath foreign suns.  
For even thus, if the tree's root survive,  
Fair shade its distant leaf extendeth o'er  
A barren and deserted homestead, still  
Slakening the rule of Sirius' droughty star.  
And now thou hast entered, like a winter sun,  
The very hearth-place ; like the breath that cools  
Days after harvest, and the winepress full,  
As is thy life filled with deeds harvested.

—O Father Zeus !—and my remaining prayer  
Fulfil !—and that which shall be, be thy will.

*[Exeunt, into the palace, AGAMEMNON and  
CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA remains  
seated in the mule-car.]*

CHORUS

O gathering shade !  
Is it phantom-bodied fear hath cast  
The prophet forth, and the unbidden singer made  
A solitary ? Is it the tangled past  
Of dreams, which the fair forms of day release,  
And waking courage solves ?—The day has come,  
And still it is not these.  
The day of Ilium  
Hath aged to this hour.  
The ships of sailing memory,  
The empty strand.

Is it their return I see,  
When, stricken from my hand  
The lyre, and by the voice within  
Confused, breath comes not but with threnody  
And dron'd Erynnus ? Though in that fierce din  
Heart burst, yet Righteousness  
Will on the panting torrent press  
Her labour to the end ;  
And in that whirlpool I



With feeble clamour lend  
To fathomless woe  
A voice of prayer, and know  
'Tis without hope I cry.

There is no well-to-fare  
In life, when best to win  
Is to find wanting there.  
It is not Health at all,  
So neighboured by Disease,  
Who, ever at the wall,  
A crouching shadow is,  
Intent to enter in.

—That fair ship, seeming to maintain  
Her even course, beset  
By the unknown, the sunken rock, the bane  
Of sailors ;—yet  
The master-wisdom, reckoning  
His freightage, may the over-burthen note,  
And from the bulwarks fling  
Unvalued jettison, a toll to fate ;  
Leavening, until she float  
Again, his ship, his substance, his estate  
Upon the waters. Thus  
Comes hope to the seafarer ; yea,  
And to the needy slaves of dearth,  
When the all-gatherer, Zeus,  
Of harvest, spills his plenty in the way  
Of annual earth.

But hope to you, O men of blood,  
Comes not at all.  
The drops of sacred blood once spilled  
Have no recall.  
Was one of old time skilled  
To raise the dead ?  
His fate but showed  
Whereto the empery of nature led.  
—Ah no ! Could some divine  
Amend the human lot once drawn,  
And night of destiny  
Merge in alternate dawn,  
Swifter than any tongue, O heart of mine,  
With tidings such as these should be,  
Thou hadst shown it now. But hark !  
Upon what fearful summons do I grope  
With trembling shades and scarce for dread suspire ?  
No thread of hope  
Drawn from the stranded dark  
And patterned fire.

[*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

CLYTEMNESTRA

Enter. Cassandra is thy name ? Thou too  
Wilt find provision made. Need it be said,  
The peace which Zeus hath given extends to thee,  
A portion in our feast, however small ;  
A place beside our altar, though a slave's.

Come down. Look not above thee. So did not  
Alcmena's son, reputed to have borne  
The yoke of slavery in a foreign mart.  
Besides, if need to serve, 'tis well to have  
Of possible masters, not the newly rich.  
For those whom fortune hath surprised are raw  
To none so much as to their servants. We  
Are of the temper that belongs to power.  
This you will prove.

#### CHORUS

She waits your answer. She has said but fair.  
And you, who are the spoil of destiny,  
Will choose to obey ; or, if you do not choose,  
Will still obey.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

There is a barbarous kind  
Of speech, like the bird-clamour of the roof,  
About our ears. Therewith a barbarous way  
Of understanding. If she be not one  
Of these, persuasion wins.

#### CHORUS

How else, for all  
The choice there is ? No better to sit there,  
Than follow, as she bids thee.

## Clytemnestra

This is as much  
Of outdoor leisure as I have to spend.  
Fire burns upon the household altar, there  
The sheep of sacrifice are tied and wait  
For us, who have waited long enough for this.  
—Dost still delay ? Thy lot is not thine own ;  
But this occasion is the gods', and this  
We share with thee.—She hears me not ! Uncouth.  
—Attempt not then thy barbarous speech, but make  
Some sign, with what civility thou canst.

## CHORUS

Ah, 'tis interpreter she needs. How like  
Some wild thing newly taken in the net.

## Clytemnestra

Yes, from the newly taken city come,  
She rages and still starts at every sound.  
The bridle is not used to fit, there's froth,  
There's red aversion foamed at the mouth. But  
    wait ;  
The reins are mine.

[Exit CLYTEMNESTRA into the palace.]

## CHORUS

Ah, piteous creature, hear ; it is not I  
Am angered with thee. At thy journey's end,

Come down, attempt the yoke, with needful grace  
For what must needs be borne.

CASSANDRA

O hear me, hear me, gods.  
Apollo, O Apollo.

CHORUS

But when did he thou callest, when  
Did Loxias give heed to voice of fear ?

CASSANDRA

Hear ; save.  
Apollo, Apollo.

CHORUS

She calls again on whom 'tis weariness  
For grief to call. He is not Sorrow's god.

CASSANDRA

The streets are full of his name.  
But he is mine.  
Apollo.  
Ah, now thou leavest me ; ah, now thou art gone.

CHORUS

Her own despair is now the prophetess,  
Divinity left in a mind enslaved.

CASSANDRA

The many voices thou hearest ;  
But me,  
Apollo, Apollo,  
Me whither hast thou led ? Unto what roof ?

CHORUS

The House of Atreus, since thou askest this.  
But do we tell thee aught thou dost not know ?

CASSANDRA

Woe, woe, hereby.  
Hate, hate—the gods know it for hate.  
Murder—she goeth not abroad ;  
She need but listen here  
For step of friend.  
Hangs ever here  
The rope that hanged.  
This choking—so breath must fail.  
This damp—they have not drained  
The death-places of blood, men's blood—

CHORUS

Hound-like, on scent of blood—

CASSANDRA

And children's. O, these are my witnesses.  
Ye know the truth I tell, for they cry out

In death, their bodies burned, their flesh, their flesh  
A father's banquet.

CHORUS

We are thy witnesses.  
Soothsayer, yes. We ask not this to say.

CASSANDRA

But what is now—but what is now  
Of horror heaped within those doors ?  
What fiend's work plotting ? None  
Can save, none can remove.  
Help so far off is none, none, none.

CHORUS

Things of the past which thou hast told are known  
To all the race, but not these present fears.

CASSANDRA

Wilt do it, wretched one ?  
Couched is he ? Bathest thou his journey's dust ?  
—I'll not tell the end, it is too near.  
Those hands—one is stretched forth already.  
No, 'tis the other reaches forth to kill.

CHORUS

Away with thoughts not to be guessed at, things  
Unseen. The eye is blurred that sees these things.

CASSANDRA

Nay, but 'tis plain ;  
The victim's quite enmeshed. Death has him fast.  
Ruin for consort, who escape the snare  
Of such a bedfellow ? She has him fast.  
—Voices that haunt the house,  
Begin again, let wail. They are not satisfied,  
So there's another due for vengeance.

CHORUS

The voice thou hearest and still callest on,  
Is it Erynnus ? Not that thy word is clear.  
Only before my heart's dull vision blood  
Rains purple down, like drops  
Of mortal issue, from the wounded frame  
Of life, when sunset yields to dark.

CASSANDRA

Look, look !—For pity unlock  
Those monstrous nuptials.  
A horn'd dagger she hides. Black, black it is.  
A bathrobe hides it.  
He on the crystal edge  
Hath fallen, and from the cleansing laver's lip  
Hath taken stain of death.

CHORUS

I cannot claim to have followed to the end  
That wisdom's theme wherewith the gods have filled



The lips of prophets, but this truth is mine ;  
The things they have to tell an evil likeness wear  
To naught of good to men.  
Come art, the many, the sweet-syllabled,  
Come melody the most divine,  
The burden is the same, that teaches only fear.

CASSANDRA

O heavy fate, now is my turn of death,  
To enter on the stream of destiny.  
Me hither, wretched, wherefore didst thou lead,  
Thyself O foully slain, to die with thee ?

CHORUS

Who art thou, what is thy lament ?  
Is for thyself the passion'd strain,  
Wherein the mortal means are spent  
On more than mortal ? Art thou she  
Who " Itys " cries  
And " Itys," and again ;  
—The singer of brown dusk, the nightingale  
Of earth far-blossoming with pain.

CASSANDRA

The nightingale ! Who hears  
That voice ? as if it were

“ O earth ! O sorrow ! ”—But they gave  
A winged shape to her,  
And a sweet life away from tears.  
—In my cold death is none to save.

#### CHORUS

This voice that is despair,  
So sweetly sounds,  
'Tis some divine possession. Yet  
A note of terror breaks the bounds  
Of a pure music, shadows that beset  
The path, and horror lurking there.

#### CASSANDRA

Paris, thou and thy bride !  
Thou hast ruined us, my brother. Ah !  
Scamander, river of home !  
My way was deep in green  
By thy old waterside,  
Where I remember always to have been.  
Alas, no more.  
But I that never left thee, unto this have come,  
O wailing river, O dark shore.

#### CHORUS

Who is so new to life as not to hear  
In these the tones of death ?

—As though myself did overtake  
Some treacherous blow, so clear  
The word she saith,  
That grips my heart, as it would break.

CASSANDRA

My country ! O the burdens borne,  
The battles, and the end !  
My father's house ! the stones upturned  
For altars, and the fields  
Emptied of grazing herds, to spend  
On fruitless heaven and doom they could not  
stay.  
—Enough, even my spirit yields.  
I must put all away.

CHORUS

It follows, all,  
As the spirit, dropt from what height  
Informs thee, in the language used of pain,  
—O voice most musical !  
—And death, ranging beyond my sight,  
And where to question is in vain.

CASSANDRA

No longer, as it were the bride of fear,  
The Oracle peers from a veil obscure.

Comes now, as oft at restless dawn, a wind,  
And with that change to visible, the waves  
Gather a greater head of waters, to  
The plunge of last calamity.—Enough  
Ye know to join your witness unto mine,  
Following the tracks of ancient trouble here.  
Ye singers of this house did ne'er march forth  
To happy music ; ne'er had good to tell  
Of this your dwelling. So much, then, ye know  
Of spirits that haunt, of revellers within,  
That sit at table there, and will not move,  
—'Tis Murder fills the cup—till from the roof  
The midnight chanty shrieks, voice unto voice  
Calling out of the past, they mouth the tale  
Like garbage. Once a brother's bed defiled,  
What crime obscene answered the trampler's guilt ?  
—I have said it, all have I divined. Must I  
Seem some loose teller of wild fortunes at  
Your doors ? Must I approve myself again ?  
—Believe—swear ye believe that what I know  
Is of my own divining.

#### CHORUS

I could swear,  
But though my faith were uttered on an oath  
What help were that to thee ? I am amazed  
That one, as thou, a stranger born, from far  
And newly come to us, should know these things.

CASSANDRA

It was Apollo's gift to me. Time was  
When I had shame in saying it.

CHORUS

Was he  
Thy lover, then ? And did the favour sought  
By him, a god, of thee a mortal—

CASSANDRA

Nay  
But in fair seeming and yet godlike he  
My suitor was.

CHORUS

To wedlock couldst thou come,  
And children born to him ?

CASSANDRA

Loxias !—I made  
Consent, I promised, I deceived

CHORUS

When he had filled thee with this gift divine ?

CASSANDRA

Yes—after he had given. The city then  
Was marvelling at my power.

CHORUS

What then ? Did he,  
Did Loxias let thee go unscathed ?

CASSANDRA

Alas  
For my unfaith ! What prophetess was I ?  
Henceforth no man believed me.

CHORUS

Nay, but I  
Believe thee !

CASSANDRA

O, rid me of this thing, 'tis evil, evil.  
On such a brink I sway, of such a burden  
Possessed, at any word of it I am lost.  
—Those children !—Look, those little ones again,  
Do ye see them ? So like shades transfixed in dream ;  
So motionless they sit, as fitting those  
Surprised with death by those who fondled them.  
Their hands, those small dead hands, they seem to  
hold  
Some offering of themselves. A father ?—not  
A father takes their gory contents ; no,  
'Tis horror-past, pity cannot reach there.  
And vengeance ? Is it for this that I see such

Home-keeping, nerveless thing of lion-kind  
Turn himself in the absent monarch's lair ?  
This is a king Slavery herself must own,  
And we of wasted Troy attest his power.  
And yet he knows not how he stands in terms  
Of hell's conspiracy with the tongue that gave  
Him welcome and is waiting chance to bite.  
—'Tis of the bitch I speak, she only dares  
The female part of murder. Is there name  
Of her among unnameable, beasts that creep  
Before and after ? Such was Scylla, hid  
In gulfs that swallow shipwreck. Such was she,  
Mother of death, that warred on her own kind.  
Didst hear the gladness feigned for his return ?  
The peal of triumph, as in battle swells  
The turn of victory ? It matters not  
What ye did hear, nor what ye take from me.  
There is what shall be, and shall be too soon  
To cost the prophetess more pains than these.  
Your faith stands with your pity, not far off.

#### CHORUS

Tale of his children's flesh Thyestes had  
To banquet on, I understood too well,  
Horror best left in its unfigured shade.  
The rest I follow not to understand.

#### CASSANDRA

Not when I speak of Agamemnon's end ?

CHORUS

Take care of words like these, though for thyself  
Thou'rt desperate.

CASSANDRA

There's no help in words of yours.

CHORUS

No, not if these things were. But they are not,  
And may not be.

CASSANDRA

Be the protesting word  
Your care. Theirs is to kill.

CHORUS

Whose? What, I say?  
What man's?

CASSANDRA

Thou hast not listened well.

CHORUS

No, not  
To gather this.



CASSANDRA

As though I did not speak  
Your tongue.

CHORUS

In oracles as dark to see,  
The Pythian speaks the tongue of Hellas too.

CASSANDRA

Ah, not again !—Lycian Apollo, ah,  
Put out the fire ! it draws too near.  
—One of a race of kings, this lion's mate,  
In her lord's absence couches with a wolf.  
If such a one hath spite, how should it spare  
A wretch like me ? She'll not forget to mix  
My portion in the draught of death. For him  
A dagger sharpened ; for my presence here  
With him, the thrust deep, deep as vengeance  
Can take it. O, this mockery on my breast,  
This mantic wreath I have worn, this prophet's staff ;  
Should these survive mine injury of death ?  
—Lie there and do no harm ; the vanity  
Will not be found again in woman weak  
As I, to wear prophetic likeness. None  
Will touch. Take back thy gift, Apollo ! See,  
He has divested me, looks on me now  
As I was, but for the shame that's past. I had friends  
Whose mockery drove me wild, and to think all

Mine enemies. They called me—what ?  
I might have been a vagrant in their path,  
Witless, and hunger-driven to frenzy, asking  
This charity of them—to be believed.  
Here is an end. My lord of wisdom, he  
Has brought me to the wisdom of the dead.  
For altar—O my father's house,  
And the lov'd temple-service there !  
—This block, this blood-splash, this before mine  
eyes.

Vengeance ? Yes, there will be to pay this debt  
Of dying, someone to make pay the price.  
Another branch of murder-bearing tree,  
Son of his father, and his mother too,  
Avenging one upon the other. He  
Shall wander out of exile, to renew  
The home-acquaintances, builders of wrath,  
And cope the muniment of death. For him  
No other way but to seek out the place  
That saw his sire struck down. For him no choice,  
Bound by no oath but what the heavens have sworn.  
—I weep not for the sorrows of this house,  
Seeing my own, my Ilium come to what  
These eyes have seen, my people come to this,  
And in heaven's judgment come. I have come too,  
To endure as they ; I can endure as well  
To die. I will address me to these doors,  
Ask death to open to me. I think there is  
No more to ask ; only that when it fall,

The blow may end me, and no need to shrink  
Or struggle ; but a closing of the eyes  
On a swift-running stream. x

CHORUS

O, whither now  
Hath sorrow led thee ? Wisdom to what bourne  
Arrived, that looking, as thou seem'st to do,  
On thine own death, thou canst go to it thus,  
All-knowing, to endure ; not as the ox  
That paces slow the route of sacrifice,  
And yet as far from fear ?

CASSANDRA

Help there is none,  
O strangers. So what need prolong the hour ?

CHORUS

Yet, to put off the hour, this is the thought  
Even of age, when we have come to it. x

CASSANDRA

The day has come, I am not its fugitive. x

CHORUS

What courage ! so to bear. x

CASSANDRA

'Tis all they need,  
Who miss the path of happiness.

CHORUS

Grace left  
To those unfortunate—nobly to face  
The end.

CASSANDRA

My father ! so didst thou, and so  
We of thy house. And yet—

CHORUS

What comes to thee ? What labour of the heart  
For breath ?

CASSANDRA

These walls—a smell of blood—of blood—

CHORUS

A burning on the hearth, an incense strange  
To thee.

CASSANDRA

No, no, a breath of open graves.

CHORUS

No words of mine can balm instil in what  
Thou tastest now.

CASSANDRA

As well within as here,  
To handle that last cup. Is it finished with him ?  
Hath Agamemnon tasted ?—I have yet  
Life—to be rid of. Strangers, farewell.  
I was to dwell with you.  
Alas, you say. But no. Behold me now,  
Not like that shrieking bird in quickset fear,  
No, not like that. I want your witness still  
To that dead woman which is myself ;—when for  
my cause  
Yet other woman perish, aye, and man too,  
For other man ill-mated.—I was to be  
Your guest, but life is done.

CHORUS

O, for compassion's sake—beseech the gods  
That otherwise—

CASSANDRA

Not a word, not for myself  
I pray, yet one word more. It is to thee,  
To thee, Sun of my life, light of last day.  
—Thou seest none my avenger ; me a slave

They kill, and fear no reckoning. Yet not so ;  
Mine are the avengers of the mightier dead  
That die with me. This, this is human, this  
Is life. Joy was a shadow, and no more  
The marks of pain. Behold, how easy 'tis  
To rub them off. The writing's vanished. This  
Is only more to pity.

*[Exit CASSANDRA, into the palace.]*

#### CHORUS

O house of fame,  
Example to the world of power ;  
Hath no one of thy name,  
Even at this hour,  
Prudence to shut the door in fortune's face,  
Or deprecate, at least,  
The gifts unloaded there ?  
For Illium's captive grace  
Stands at the conqueror's feast,  
Gods of homecoming fair  
Attend ; whence then this cry  
Of blood once shed ?  
If he, the glorious living, die  
For so long dead,  
An end would be  
To all that earthly-dwellers have,  
Or hope to save,  
From the ill-genius of mortality.

AGAMEMNON (*Within*)

Smitten am I . . .

CHORUS (LEADER)

Silence !—Whose voice is that, whose voice of death ?

AGAMEMNON

Again !

CHORUS (LEADER)

'Tis ended !—'tis the King !—what counsel, say ?

VARIOUS VOICES OF THE CHORUS

Mine is—to the city—rouse we all we can.

—Nay—in with us—the evidence of guilt  
Is there to take red-handed.

—I am for doing—and that quickly—what ?

—One thing is clear—a tyranny prepares  
To fasten on us.

—Yet we do naught—their ready hands will bring  
To scorn our purpose thus deferred.

—We should have been prepared. Counsel is hard  
To suit to action.

—Counsel will not bring  
The dead to life.

—No, nor our own lives given.  
But 'tis a dastard purchase, at the cost.

—Aye, death were better than such tyranny.

—But—to make sure—art certain it was death ?

—How sounded it ? Let us not say too much ;  
'Tis but conjecture, there is yet to know.

—To know—aye, there's the point—how fares it with  
The King ?

[*Enter CLYTEMNESTRA from the palace, dis-  
closing the bodies of AGAMEMNON and  
CASSANDRA*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now I can speak, where opportunity  
Was never truth to tell, but always false,  
Always to fear. How else ? When enemies  
Go in another likeness, we must wear  
That likeness too, and with a friendly gesture  
Invite. It was a snare set long ago,  
No risk could be admitted to the issue.  
Sudden it seems, but much went to it, this



Is but the final cast. Yet more than that.  
'Twas here I struck, and here I stand assured  
Of all I struck for, even to own the deed,  
And say, was it not well done, that gave no chance  
To escape, nor made uncertainty of death ?  
Fairly I cast, and drew the net ashore.  
Seamless I wove, that the rich dress might suit.  
I struck him in it twice.  
As many times he groaned, and therewith took  
The pose of death. I had done ; but to make up  
The tale of tribute due to gods who wait  
Beneath the earth for souls of passing men,  
And so they should not wait for him in vain,  
I struck once more, the third time. To be sure,  
His parting breath did linger not at all,  
And life ran fountain-free and slaughter-red ;  
I was myself bedewed, a darksome kind  
Of rain ; but, O, gods never opened heaven  
On such a thirsty earth as I, nor brought  
A more delightful season to the womb  
Of life's expectant pain. But ye know not  
How these things be ;—old men of Argos, get  
What joy you can from things that make for joy.  
I tend triumphant altars ; I would make  
Libation here ; this, this should be the flesh  
Of sacrifice, were it seemly, as 'tis just ;  
—O justice never to be questioned ! Cup  
Thou hast drained ; yea, thou, who didst it fill for us  
With imprecation ; thou hast tasted, thou !

CHORUS

And this thy husband ! O amazing tongue,  
That darest all unspeakable to speak !

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes, in a woman, 'tis no doubt beyond  
Belief. And then, that I should tell of it,  
And in the telling show no natural fear,  
Nor nice regard for aught I might receive  
Of praise or blame from you who know so much,  
Such as, I was his wife, and this was he,  
My husband—now the corpse of my right hand ;  
And justice done, and I again, the doer.  
So stands the case that naught could make more  
plain.

CHORUS

What taste of earth, defamed,  
Or poison-seas hath passed  
Thy lips, that frenzy led,  
And world aghast,  
Thou hast strange altars fed  
With sacrifice unnamed ?  
And thou, unnameable—the race  
Of men, earth's remnant left inhabited,  
Will look not on thy face.

### CLYTEMNESTRA

So ready are ye with justice, to pronounce  
Hate, execration, banishment, in name  
Of public conscience. \ This for me, but what  
For him, who brought our human flesh to trade  
Of butchery ; who, that time, when pastures teemed  
With eligible sacrifice, sought out  
His child—and of my children one—that one  
I was mother to, that sweetest breath he cast  
To Thracian dragon-mouths, unravelling  
The winds' foul magic. Could ye not have joined  
The human hunt, and tracked the pestilence  
To him who breathed it first ? Instead of which  
Ye put the scent of crime upon my deeds,  
And, justice-mongering, dilate on them.  
Proceed, and get the better if ye can  
Of truth, and use the power ye have not now.  
I'll suffer you, though even yet the gods  
Put off the issue. You, even you, will learn.

### CHORUS

A burden to breaking 'tis,  
And reason over-reaching ; loud  
To speak.—What madness this,  
That shakes a dripping shroud,  
To dash thine eyes  
With blood, and drive to spend  
The last thou hast on that which all denies,  
But blow for blow and friendlessness for friend !

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ha, there's the sanction of divine in this  
The oath I swear. Hear it, by Até and  
Erynus, names of dread whose service due  
To Justice put it in my hands to slay  
The murderer of my child. I do not think,  
While I have one to mend my fire at home,  
That Fear will have for me his quaking guest.  
Ægisthus, he it is who stands with me,  
The shield behind my point of courage. What  
Of him? Nay, rather, what of this? Here  
lies

The woman, too, and not the only one.  
A little more of honey-sweet and less  
Of poison-barb he left behind with those  
Of Chryseis' coast-girls, altar-flames, I trow ;  
—This one he hath had allayed for him too soon.  
For bedmate, something of the sibyl-kind.  
Ah, the wise spending of the curtained time!  
Shipboard as well, so favourably planned  
For converse. They have paid for what they  
had.

We'll count the cost, as so much he, and she,  
Swan-song to boot, the dying flavour fled,  
So much, cold sweetheart. Does it balance? She  
Has not subtracted, by her lying there,  
More than a very little from the pleasure  
With which, awhile, I did for my own board  
Contract.

## CHORUS

Shut down, shut down  
The light of day in us,  
Lead darkness on  
To endless sleep, that thus  
The vision of him here  
Become not now, through hours untold,  
Bedridden thought's attendant fear ;  
Our king, our strength,  
Our counsellor,  
By woman dead at length,  
Who, living, bore  
A burden woman-heaped of old.

—Helen, for thee  
What Ilian numbers fled  
On spirit-wings the Ilian shore ?  
Misguided Helen, see  
Whom thou hast added to thy dead,  
And now canst add no more.

For thou, of tendril'd strife  
The stem that grew,  
All-clasping, shadowy,  
The walls that were the house of life,  
Blood-watering, hast brought to flower anew  
Dead-branched memory.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ask not for Death—he's here ;  
Spend not your breath beside  
To catch at Helen's name.  
She need not bear the blame  
For all the deaths that Greeks have died,  
For every man's heart that hath turned to fear.

CHORUS

A spirit accurst, a power malign,  
Descends, O Tantalus,  
On thee and house of thine.  
One, woman-habited,  
Appears and speaks to us  
In tones that still the feast of death prolong.  
The raven o'er its dead  
Speaks that tongue.

CLYTEMNESTRA

A spirit accurst !—ye have it, nay,  
Could not avoid it, where  
It comes forever in your way,  
Untimely foetus, cast again,  
Again to rear,  
A monster suckling—'tis to allay  
That blood-accustomed thirst, lie here  
The newly slain.

### CHORUS

Ye have named it—of  
Our demon-mastered race  
Soul-clutching terror, lurking in hearth-place.  
Have we not cried, Enough ?  
To Zeus we have cried, O cause divine,  
Are these works thine ?  
Without thee, nothing ; none  
Beside thee, god. Thou and thy works are one.

But O, our King, our King !  
The tears thy friendless people shed !  
For us the net they fling  
That gathers thee with the unkinglike dead.

—'Twas not thy fighting-breath,  
Alas, that fled  
A secret-handed death.

### CLYTEMNESTRA

The hand that slew the Argive King,  
—Remember this—  
It was not Argive Queen ; I am not I,  
No, no :—phantom-inhabiting  
This body, spirit-centred here,  
The old plagues fly.  
And he whom rumoured fate hath chosen to die,  
Was not my husband ; not his wife was I,

Howbeit my bed his bier.  
And though my table seems to have  
Feast spread of unclean thing,  
It is that Atreus-memory, which gave  
Young limbs for banqueting.

#### CHORUS

Who, that is witness here,  
Of murder, shall another witness bear  
To what thou sayest ? how runs the tale ?  
How lifts in thee the ancestral veil ?  
How springs to light, beneath  
Thy hand, the unforgetting skill of death,  
Lurking, long generations down,  
And rained on by the drops self-sown,  
And adult-harvested,  
To freshen stains of infant-dead ?

—But O, our King, our King !  
The tears thy friendless people shed !  
For us the net they fling  
That gathers thee with the unkinglike dead.

—'Twas not thy fighting-breath  
Alas, that fled  
A secret-handed death.



CLYTEMNESTRA

That secret hand again !  
—Who first sowed strife,  
A vast night-growing bane,  
Shedding unspoken thoughts of death ?  
Who dragged beneath  
The shadow of its pain  
My branch of weeping life,  
Iphigeneia, thy child ?

[*Addressing the corpse of AGAMEMNON.*

—Take with thee underground  
Those lips defiled  
With blasphemies of love,  
Front hell with them, let sound  
That boast—and still find breath enough  
To awake the anguished wound.

CHORUS

Stunned out of thought  
I stagger, all my counsel is  
To fling hands of despair  
Against this bringing all to naught,  
This ruining kingdom, this  
Dark-raining air,  
That lashes to the fall  
Their blood-sprent towers.  
—What, stand they yet ? Is all  
Over ? The empty hours

Of silence hold  
A sound of grinding ; Fate her hand hath freed,  
And lethal weapon tries  
On other stones for other deed  
That secret lies  
In story untold.

Earth should have covered me,  
Or ever silver-sided stream  
Became his blood-bath and his seat of death.  
Who is there gathereth  
To sepulture ? Who starteth theme  
Of royal grief, and maketh last amends ?  
—If thou, of all the race,  
Think to do aught of mourning-kind,  
His spirit yet defends  
Itself from this disgrace,  
And there are wanting not  
Tears, and there is a grief to find  
That looks not from thy face.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Ye trouble yourselves, where naught  
Follows from all the counsel ye may give.  
It falls on us to act. Burial, some prepare.  
Mourners, we leave.  
A houseful, doubtless.—What  
Of further escort ; those

He should find midway the darkness, where  
The pale dividing river flows ?  
Feet that have trod the wild,  
Eager to meet,  
Arms to embrace, and lips to greet.  
—Iphigeneia, his child ;  
She will be there.

#### CHORUS

She bears all down, answer I need.  
Reason with reason wars, reason is none.  
Spoiled is the spoiler now, the seed  
Of death is in the reaping. One  
Who can to everlasting wait,  
Ponders the deed.  
And if he speak, it is a word of fate  
That solemn sounds,  
But nothing frees  
From the unbroken bounds  
Of these wall'd secrecies.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

How near ye come to truth, how near  
The oracular, the dark,  
The uninterpreted.  
I wish—I wish that here  
Such spirit would bring  
His demon-understanding into pact

With mine ;—bury the dead,  
Let be what has been,  
Hard though it was to bear.  
Away—away. Be seen  
No longer at our door.  
Waste with self-inflicted death  
Another race, untried,  
And able still to bear.  
My spirit saith,  
Surrender all ;— kingdom and wealth beside,  
But kill no more.

[*Enter ÆGISTHUS.*]

ÆGISTHUS

O day of kindness ! In thy face I see  
The looks of heaven compassionate the pain  
Of earth. Justice is visible, and Fate  
Hath woven to the light, that all may mark  
The pattern of Erynnus on the robe  
Whose workmanship I love, wherein he lies.  
In this ye may behold a father's hand.  
Atreus, this dead man's sire, was ruler here.  
Thyestes, my father, was this Atreus' brother.  
Our fathers, then, dwelt here, and enmity  
Arose between them. So my father fled.  
Then followed him in exile, as it were,  
Some word of reconciliation ; and in hope  
Of peace, and eager, came Thyestes back,

My father, to his home. He found not death ;  
But in that house, where home and children  
were,

As was most fit, more than a friend should find,  
A feast already spread ; Atreus must show  
A brother's token of forgiveness. Food  
Was set before them. Atreus sat not near  
His brother. Atreus kept the dish his side,  
Wherefrom he served his brother. 'Twas a mess  
Whose indistinguishable part he served.  
Remained the tokens ;—sodden fingers, feet—  
To show at last, whereby Thyestes knew  
His children. Ah, taste unprocurable  
Of death ! A father's vomit—hear the curse  
That overturned the board ! No more shall  
house

Of Pelops stand, no more shall Atreus stand.  
Ye feel the shock this day ; ye see the fallen.  
—Of this unbuilding, 'tis my boast to have been  
The just artificer. Thyestes' child  
I was, the new-born left of those he had,  
And in his bosom he seized me when he fled.  
Justice has reared me, brought me back to be  
In my own house a stranger, yet at home,  
The while I had this man to wait for, fasten  
This thing upon him, find his death within  
My compass. So to plant the stakes of doom  
For him, spending myself upon his death,  
Were beautifully to contrive my own.

### CHORUS

Here is ill done, Ægisthus, and no room,  
For thoughts bemused with sounding words of thine,  
All we have heard is that thou hadst the will  
To do this deed ; nay, more, the craft to work  
This piteous ending ; and thou knowest well,  
Justice can make no answer, but in terms  
Of thy own kind, by force outweighing force,  
—The people's arm is long, the curse of it  
Lies not in tongues ; so many are the hands  
That take to stoning.

### ÆGISTHUS

So speaks the lower deck  
That pulls the galley. There are higher ranks  
Direct the course. 'Tis hard for age like thine  
To learn, and to be bidden what to learn ;  
And yet thou'rt like to learn. Prison and pain  
Of famine, are not these subtle physicians  
To malady of age ? Is it blindness ? No.  
Ye see whither ye are driven. Is it heels ye fling  
Against the whip ? False step to chastisement !

### CHORUS

What shall I tell of thee ? A woman's part  
Prolonged at home, when men were fighting ? What  
Was wanting of adulterous and false  
In one who worked to such an end as this ?

ÆGISTHUS

There is the sounding of a world of troubles  
Through all our ears, for thee. What other kind  
Of Orpheus art thou, charming with thy song  
Out of their lairs the barking mouths, the pack  
Insensible, which Orpheus never led ?  
An altered government will mean a cage  
For these wild ways.

CHORUS

As though an Argive State  
Could fashion thee its tyrant !— who thyself  
Darest not to do the deed which thou hadst planned,  
Deputing murder—

ÆGISTHUS

How should I, suspect  
To all the house through my old enmity,  
Make veiled approach ? The woman's chance it  
was,  
Unquestioned. Now it is my part to rule ;  
And I, with this man's substance to my hand,  
Shall have the wherewithal to lay on him  
Who lighter rein esteems not, what shall test  
His champing mettle, and the bit will hold,  
Or for a stable-fellow he shall have  
The kindless sort, and dark to fast upon,  
Until his eye lack fire.

CHORUS

This man, I say,  
Thou'rt not, who could despoil this dead man of  
His life, unless a woman did it, matching  
Thy cowardice with her poison-spirit, marring  
The place of home and its divinity  
Enshrined. Orestes !— Father, looks thy son  
On light of day that shall endure until  
He make a night of death to hide these twain ?

ÆGISTHUS

What meanest thou ? Whether word or action touch  
Thy meaning nearest, thou shalt know, and soon.  
—Out, out, my waiting swords ! Your time has come.  
[Enter ARMED FOLLOWERS OF ÆGISTHUS.]

CHORUS

Out, out !—That means, prepare ! Out, every man,  
his sword.

ÆGISTHUS

I, too, shall have a hand at last, come death to me !

CHORUS

Now bring thy word to pass, put it to fortune's proof.

CLYTEMNESTRA

No more—O, as thou lov'st me, do no more.  
My friend, what we have gathered should suffice,



Where all we gather is but pain and death.  
Old men, go to your homes. And thou, too, go !  
Before 'tis done, and then no more to do,  
But all to suffer. Besides, there is to make  
Secure what's done. 'Tis not in us to show  
Unwounded courage fit for further bout  
With fate. And if this last counsel of mine  
Seem but a woman's, it is better so.

ÆGISTHUS

Not prune the rampant growth of tongues like these ?  
—Their words, if left to fall, a dangerous seed  
May prove. It is not wisdom in a king  
To leave them there.

CHORUS

'Tis not in Argive born  
To own thee king.

ÆGISTHUS

Put off to other days  
The issue we shall join.

CHORUS

Divinity  
Direct Orestes to this aim !

ÆGISTHUS

Ah, he !

The fugitive picks up a scanty meal  
Of hope.

CHORUS

And thou—thou battenest here, the while  
Sick Justice spurns the board.

ÆGISTHUS

Has he a fool's

Impunity to speak again ?

CHORUS

Canst crow,

Thou, on thy roost, thou and thy mate beside.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Have patience such as words like these do not deserve.  
For thou and I need much to order all things well.







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